Poverty and Social Policy is a graduate course/seminar in public assistance policy for students interested in policy analysis and public management as a profession. The course offers a comprehensive introduction to analytic and political issues surrounding the ongoing American and British debates on poverty and social policy. The objective is to train students to ask the right questions when evaluating social assistance programs and to appreciate the complementary roles of policy analysis and public management in formulating such questions and in interpreting the answers.

First- and second-year MPA and MPP candidates and persons in the Ph.D. program are welcome to enroll in this course. Students should have completed, or choose to concurrently enroll in, applied statistics (i.e. PPPA 6002, “Research Methods and Applied Statistics”) and microeconomics (i.e. PPPA 6014, “Economics and Policy Analysis”) or the equivalent.

There are three “texts”:


All three books are readily available on Amazon or from other booksellers and can be downloaded. Required and recommended readings are listed below by class session; readings for some sessions will be identified in consultation with students and added to later syllabus versions. Full references for the required readings are provided in the separately distributed Course Bibliography that is posted in the syllabus section on Blackboard. This list also includes sources for materials discussed and/or distributed in class and details on suggested additional readings. A Reader’s Guide will be distributed for some sections to assist in navigation.

Each student will be responsible for a state’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, a means-tested social assistance program other than TANF, and a research review. These will be selected in consultation with the instructors. All class materials will be posted on the GWU “Blackboard” website. Readings for the four sections devoted to student reports will be determined in consultation with students and will be posted following these discussions.

This is a graduate course, and students concerned about grades might be better served elsewhere. Evaluation will be based on problem sets, class participation, a take-home midterm, and a take-home final examination. Standards will be discussed in more detail in class.

* Tyler Rockey (MPP 2015) contributed to the development of the present version of this course.
Michael Wiseman holds office hours immediately before class and by appointment. He is also available via FaceTime or Skype. His office is located in MPA 608. Students are encouraged to contact him by email when appropriate. Yelena Tsilker will be available for technical assistance with problem sets and other matters. Questions regarding the readings or problems will be handled as discussions on Blackboard. This ensures that the information is shared.

**Session Plans**

Reading references below are abbreviated. For full citations, see the *Course Bibliography* posted in the syllabus section on Blackboard. Most readings are available as Electronic Reserves on Blackboard. When it is useful for you to be familiar with reference location, we include the URL.

(1) **1/14**

**Introduction: Social Policy and Public Assistance**


**Problems:** Problem 1, “Poverty and Income Distribution,” distributed (due 1/31; last questions in class 1/29).

**Readings:** Continue (or begin) DeParle, Jason (2004): *American Dream*. Please finish the book by February 5.

Read the introduction to Shafir and Mullainathan (2013): *Scarcity*.

(2) **1/21**

**Poverty and Income Distribution**


*Income Distribution*


The Official Standard


The Supplemental Poverty Measure


International Perspective

Haveman, Robert (2009): “What does it mean to be poor in a rich society?”

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011): “Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising”


Technical

 Förster, Michael (2005): “What Are Equivalence Scales?”

(3) 1/28

**Income Support and Household Behavior**

Topics: Graphical and algebraic representations of income support programs. Income support and labor supply. The negative income tax. The New Jersey Negative Income Tax Experiment. Labor supply and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Behavior and psychology.

Problems: Problem 2, “State TANF Programs,” distributed (part 1 due 2/4; full draft due 2/15; final due shortly thereafter). Problem 1 last queries.


Federalism and the Safety Net

Topics: Modeling TANF, Interstate variation in TANF programs, Federalism: Fiscal and other aspects, Public assistance beyond TANF.

Finish DeParle, Jason (2004): American Dream by this date.
Loprest, Pam (2012): How Has the TANF Caseload Changed over Time?

American Dream: Realities of Welfare Reform, American-Style


Gais, Thomas, and James Fossett (2005): “Federalism and the Executive Branch.”

Recommended

The African-American protagonists of American Dream are in a sense immigrants from the South, first to Chicago and then to Milwaukee. Two other books focus on this part of the story, and the personal and social consequences.


TANF Aftermath

Topics: What made TANF, and what TANF made, The history of TANF since welfare reform, Major issues in TANF reauthorization, Why the “success” of welfare reform has become a common myth, The reauthorization boondoggle, Developments under Obama.


Begin or continue reading Mullainathan and Shafir, *Scarcity*.

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**(7)** 2/25  **Thinking More about Casework**


Special: Guest: **Beth Babcock**, Director, Crittenton Women’s Union, Boston.

Readings: “Session 7: Casework and the Help Factory.

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**(8)** 3/4  **Learning from Experiments**


*Evaluation Issues*
Haynes, Laura et al. (2012): *Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Controlled Trials.*
Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (2010): *Checklist for Reviewing a Randomized Controlled Trial of a Social Program or Project, To Assess Whether It Produced Valid Evidence.*

*New Hope*
Huston, Aletha et al. (2003): “New Hope for Families and Children: Five-
Year Results of a Program to Reduce Poverty and Reform Welfare.”
Executive Summary.

U.K. Employment Retention and Advancement Project

3/11 Spring Break—No class

(9) 3/18 Those Other Programs
Topics: Student reports on other means-tested programs and benefits: SSI (for children, adults, and the elderly), Section 8 (voucher and site-based), SNAP, EITC.
Problems: Take-Home Midterm posted for student access on 3/21 (Problem 4); completion by midnight 3/24.
Readings: Section 9 Reader’s Guide: Those other programs.
(Other readings student-selected)

(10) 3/25 Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (1)
Special: Video interview, Simon McNorton (Certified Welfare Inspector, PPPA 6085, Spring 2013), Research Officer, Insight and Analysis Division, UK Department for Work and Pensions.
Readings: “Session 10 Reader’s Guide: Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (1),” manuscript. NOTE: The Reader’s Guide is very important for this session.


Reeves, Richard (2014). Should the US follow the UK to a Universal Credit?


(11) 4/1 Welfare Elsewhere: The United Kingdom (2)
Topics: More on the new British regime and the implications for social policy, with a guest speaker. Social inclusion as a policy objective.

Special: Guest: (Name to be Announced), Senior Social Policy Advisor, Politics, Economics and Communication Group, British Embassy, Washington DC.

This session is held jointly with the Annual PPPA6085 Awards Banquet. More detail on location and appropriate attire will be provided in class


(12) 4/8 Policy Research (1)
Topics: Student reports on research related to means-tested social assistance (see session 9, above).

Readings: TBA

(13) 4/15 Policy Research (2)
Topics: Conclusion of student reports on policy-related research. Course review. Discussion of student questions.

Readings: TBA

(14) 4/22 Conclusion
Topics: What have we learned?